

**Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP**

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
Department of Health and Social Care

Sent via email

04 April 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing regarding the impact of placeholder job allocations for new NHS doctors applying to the UK foundation programme.

Last week, newly qualified doctors across the UK found out where they will be working for their first jobs. But nearly 700 of these final year students have instead only been given “placeholder” jobs. This means they only know which of the 18 deaneries in the UK they will be working in. These deaneries cover large regions or even entire countries in the case of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These students may not find out where their job will be until just a few weeks before their start date.

In January, we wrote to you highlighting that action needed to be taken to avoid this. We outlined change you could make to avoid this situation but unfortunately, we have not received a reply. Instead, this situation is now becoming an annual occurrence.

With only a placeholder job, students are left in limbo for months, unable to plan for housing, childcare, or their future career. Speaking to these students in the last week, most are incredibly stressed and desperate for clarity regarding what will happen next. We have heard how demoralising it is and that it can cause them to question their future within the NHS. We have even spoken to students whose placeholder allocation has made them drop out of the programme entirely.

Worryingly, we have also been unable to secure a guarantee from the UK Foundation Programme Office (UKFPO) that placeholder applicants will not be moved to a different deanery. This leaves us extremely concerned that some placeholders may even be required to move anywhere in the UK with little to no notice.

At a time when the NHS is facing unprecedented pressures and needs every doctor it can get, more must be done to support these doctors of the future. The contractual obligations of hiring these doctors should be met, and certainty for the placements provided at least eight weeks prior to the start of the foundation programme, as per the national resident doctor contract. However, we anticipate that this deadline will be breached for many of these applicants.

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The placeholder issue is also a symptom of the wider failings of the foundation programme allocation system. The process is broken and something must change. The BMA is calling for the UKFPO to be appropriately funded, for all graduates of UK medical schools to be guaranteed a foundation programme post for all future recruitment cycles, and an increase in available job posts to match the planned increase in medical school places proposed in the existing and presumably future NHS Long Term Workforce Plan.

The BMA believes that UK medical school graduates should also have their PIA (preference informed allocation) ranking prioritised over International Medical Graduates (IMGs) applying from overseas. By prioritising UK medical school graduates' ranks, this would significantly reduce, if not eliminate, graduates from UK medical schools receiving placeholder jobs as they would be allocated first. Such an approach would also significantly reduce the number of students being forced to move significant distances against their choosing. This recognises the significant investment in students' education both by students and the taxpayer - it is essential UK medical students can continue their training in the UK and gain full registration with the GMC. A similar precedent has been successfully set by the UK dental foundation programme and is also used in other countries including the Republic of Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.

We look forward to your reply and would be happy to meet with you to discuss this important issue in more detail.

Yours sincerely,



**Professor Phil Banfield**  
Chair  
BMA Council



**Rob Tucker**  
Chair  
BMA Medical Students Committee



**Elgan Manton-Roseblade**  
Deputy chair (education)  
BMA Medical Students Committee



**Callum Williams**  
Deputy chair (education)  
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